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Abstract

The aim of this research is to develop and examine a model on leadership (dis)agreement on followers’ voice behaviour and the moderating influence of followers’ moral identification. We hypothesize that ethical leadership will affect followers’ voice when (dis)agreement about ethical leadership between supervisor and followers is lower (vs. higher). We are currently collecting data through a multilevel and multisource feedback (MSF) from a large Malaysian multinational organisation to test the hypotheses. Data will be examined through a cross-level analysis using HLM. As social learning alone does not account for every social dynamic that governed the transfer of ethical values, the perspectives of role theory is drawn upon to extend the influence of leader-subordinate (dis)agreement on followers’ voice behaviour. Ethical leaders are meant to provide followers the opportunity to speak up. However, recent research on ethical leadership (dis)agreement argues that leader that rate themselves more favourably can lead to an increase in organisational deviance. Therefore, this research will extend prior knowledge on (dis)agreement about ethical leadership through a three-way interaction and introducing the construct of followers’ moral identification as a condition on the relationship. Moreover, the finding of this research will inform the impact of follower’s morality on voice behaviour in organisation. On the practical implication, leaders are expected to uphold moral standards and encourage voice to embed ethical standards within organisation. Taken together, this is the first research that examines followers’ morality through a three-way interaction on supervisor and subordinate (dis)agreement about ethical leadership and voice in organisation.
Introduction

Voice is defined as “discretionary communication of ideas, suggestions, concerns, or opinions about work related issues with the intent to improve organisational or unit functioning” (Morrison, 2011, p. 375). Literature have coined voice as a form of challenge-oriented citizenship behaviour that is likely to manifest during stronger cooperation. For example, Van Dyne and LePine (1998) suggested that “voice is making innovative suggestions for change and recommending modification to standard procedures even when others disagree” (p. 109). In other words, voice behaviour will challenge the status quo to promote positive changes in the organisation (Podsakoff, Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Maynes, & Spoelma, 2013). Existing studies have shown that voice will emerge under ethical leadership because leader encourage dialog through “a two-way communication” (Lam, Loi, Chan, & Liu, 2016 p. 280). Although employee proactive behaviour like voice, can affect the organisation’s ability to adapt and survive in times of uncertainty (Aryee, Walumbwa, Modejar, & Chu, 2017; Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007; Parker & Collins, 2010). Attention has always been given to the ethical behaviour of leadership because of their ethical stance, with limited understanding on followers’ motivation to voice (Huang & Paterson, 2017; Lam et al., 2016). However, recent published studies found the (dis)agreement of ethical leadership to affect organisational deviance (Kuenzi, Brown, Mayer, & Priesmuth, 2019), while the perception of ethical leader can be affected by the incongruency of leader and follower’s moral identity (Qin, Huang, Hu, Schminke, & Ju, 2018). Therefore, this paper will extend this perspective to look at the role of ethical leadership (dis)agreement on followers’ voice.

Ethical leadership is defined as “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationship, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision making” (Brown et al., 2005, p. 120). Although ethical leader will promote proactive behaviour
Many published studies have only considered its influence through followers’ perspective, making it important for research to understand why voice will emerge under ethical leader (Lam et al., 2016). Consequence studies have not always considered the perspective of supervisor own ethical leadership. Despite recent studies have found incongruency to increase negative sentiment and promote organisation deviance (Kuenzi et al., 2019; Qin et al., 2018). To perplex the issue on (dis)agreement about ethical leadership, voice is particularly vulnerable because followers will always evaluate the risk of speaking up (Burris, 2012). Hence, supervisor overestimating their own ethical leadership may attribute to a cognitive blind spot that silence followers altogether.

(Dis)agreement of leadership behaviour can impact the leader’s influence (Fleenor, Smither, Atwater, Braddy, & Sturm, 2010). Because integrity and honesty of ethical leadership cannot be easily observed (Kuenzi et al., 2019; Moor & Small, 2007). (Dis)agreement on supervisor’s behaviour can be associated with a decrease in favourable attitude and behaviour (see Atwater, Roush, & Fischthal, 1995). Leader with enhanced self-perception are more resistance towards feedback from others, which is an unlikely behaviour for social learning (Bandura, 1977; 1986). However, role theory (see Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964) argue that followers who disagree about ethical leadership behaviour may associate a higher risk with speaking up. Therefore, this research sets out to answer two questions. First, how is followers’ voice behaviour affected when supervisor and followers (dis)agree about ethical leadership? The research will pay attention to followers’ voice behaviour through social learning and role theory and submit that dissimilarity in perception can affect the willingness to voice. Since followers’ moral cognition can affect
their perception of ethical leadership, we address the second research question by examining the effect of followers’ moral identification on (dis)agreement.

Qin et al (2018) has shown that incongruent moral identity between supervisor and followers can increase followers’ negative sentiment. However, not much is known about the (dis)agreement of ethical leadership and followers’ moral cognition on their willingness to voice. Since (dis)agreement research on ethical leadership is only starting to emerge in literature. Knowledge is still limited about its implication on ethical biases and blind spot (Tenbrunsel, Diekmann, Wade-Benzoni, & Bazerman, 2010). Therefore, we aim to extend knowledge by examining the social mechanism that drive followers’ willingness to voice during (dis)agreement. Social learning is an important theoretical foundation for ethical leadership. However, we argue that role theory will provide a meaningful explanation that links (dis)agreement on followers’ voice. As voice has implication on organisational functions (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). The motivation to voice may be attended through other social influence mechanism. To realise this objective, a review on the theoretical foundation will underline the discrepancy of supervisor’s own ethical leadership rating in comparison to their followers. This relationship will be examined through the ethical leadership ratings of supervisor and followers on voice behaviour. Finally, we will investigate the social mechanisms to add on to the growing literature on ethical biases on (un)ethical leadership (Kuenzi et al., 2019).

The foundation of ethical leadership and role theory

The theory of ethical leadership is built on two pillars, which are moral person and moral manager. The moral person component focuses on the moral qualities of the leader, such as honesty, fair and trustworthiness, while the moral manager component focuses on their ability to reinforce these desirable behaviours (Trevino, Hartman, & Brown, 2000). Both
pillars are important to ethical leadership theory because followers will rely on them to learn
the appropriate and inappropriate behaviour (Brown et al., 2005). At the same time, these
qualities will reinforce followers’ perceptions on the normative context (Ashforth & Anand.
2003; Podsakoff, Bommer, Podsakoff, & Mackenzie, 2006). Because social learning has
often taken a one-sided perspective through followers. Why ethical leader will influence
followers’ motivation, role, and responsibilities when they exhibit both moral person and
moral manager remain limited (Mayer, Aquino, Greenbaum, & Kuenzi, 2012; Moore, Mayer,
Chiang, Crossley, Karlesky, & Birtch, 2019; Paterson & Huang, 2018).

Although ethical leadership will actively motivate follower’s proactive behaviour in
organisation through role-modelling (Brown et al., 2005; Kuenzi et al., 2019). Role theory
(see Kahn et al., 1964) argued that followers will demonstrate proactive behaviour due to
their role-consensus agreement (Matta et al., 2015). For example, in varied context (i.e.,
agreement vs disagreement), followers’ role-making can pattern their behaviour according to
the social expectation that resulted in different relationships. Role theory describe this social
phenomenon as a role-making process that can create disagreement between supervisor and
followers as it differentiates between sent and receive (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Since
disagreement can happen in dyads because of different role identities, needs, and goals that
may not be fulfilled by the leader’s resources. The misalignment of role is often ignored once
the role-making process is completed despite disagreement can persist and affect important
organisational outcome (Matta, Scott, Koopman, & Conlon, 2015). Thus, role theory may
account for the social dynamic of social learning on followers’ willingness to speak up.

**Supervisor-followers (dis)agreement and moral identification on voice behaviour**

We submit that ethical leader is more likely to listen when having followers’ best
interest in mind (Moore et al., 2019). To continue this argument, moral identification that
represents the degree one associate with context that exhibit ethical traits (see May, Chang, & Shao, 2015) is likely to influence voice behaviour in (dis)agreement situation. For example, supervisor who see themselves as highly ethical may silence their followers, which puts their authentic ethical nature in question even if they will set a standard on doing things the right way. In this instance, follower’s moral identification may act as a buffer on this relationship between disagreement and voice. Therefore, followers with high (vs. low) moral identification are likely to display higher ethical sensitivity that influence voice behaviour. Ethical leader must be consistent when displaying ethical leadership behaviour to make the expected behaviour salient. Because voice behaviour is a proactive act of role expectation, followers who voice are likely to perceive higher contextual fairness in comparison to when they’re not allowed too. This perception is also linked to procedural fairness (i.e., the extend leader uses fair procedures to allocate outcomes and in decision-making process) that may impact the long-term organisational effectiveness. Therefore, followers’ demonstration of voice may signify their satisfaction and compliance with the leadership (Hoogervorst, De Cremer, & van Dijke, 2013). This behaviour is particularly important in time of uncertainty where followers’ cooperation may positively impact the organisational effectiveness. As voice is a voluntary behaviour that will positively improve organisational functions (Morisson, 2011; Morrison, Wheeler-Smith, & Kamdar, 2011). The extent where followers will make constructive suggestion for improvement is likely to increase through a higher association with the organisation.

We predict that moral identification will explain the motivation to voice through the role of organisation (May et al., 2015). Although ethical leadership is most effective in driving down deviant behaviour (Hoch, Boomer, & Dulebohn, 2018). The relationship between ethical leader and important social influence mechanism can impact proactive behaviour (Moore et al., 2019; Walumbwa, Morrison, & Christensen, 2012). It is important to
link (dis)agreement with frequency of prosocial behaviour (Kuenzi et al., 2019). Because the underlining process that govern followers’ voice is far more complex than previously understood. Thus, we submit that high moral identification may buffer low role-consensus on the affected behaviour.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supervisor ratings</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>High</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Overestimation</td>
<td>Agreement: Stronger ethical leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Agreement: Weaker ethical leadership</td>
<td>Underestimation</td>
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Figure 1: Types of supervisor-follower (dis)agreement with corresponding ethical leader

This research extends the perspectives of Kuenzi et al (2019) to examine the effect of moral identification on followers’ voice. Members from the same group are exposed to the same social context where consistent presentation can affect the behaviour of the group as a whole (Bandura, 1986). However, disagreement can happen when supervisor overestimate or underestimate their own ethical leadership behaviour (see Figure 1). It is proposed that when supervisor overestimated their own ethical behaviour, lower role-consensus (categorise through negative mean difference) will be buffered by followers with higher moral identification and causes them to voice more. At the same time, supervisor underestimation of own ethical behaviour may not affect followers with lower moral identification. In short, when supervisor underestimate their ethical behaviour, followers who are high in moral identification are more likely to associate with the leader’s humility and this is categorised through their willingness to voice. Therefore, we hypotheses that (dis)agreement may affect
role-consensus and this positive and negative relationship is buffered by follower’s moral identification that impact voice;

*Hypothesis 1*: The mean differences between supervisor and followers rating will moderate the positive relationship between ethical leadership (i.e., supervisor and followers’ ratings) and followers’ voice (two-way interaction): The relationship is stronger when the mean difference is low, whereas relationship is weaker when mean level of ethical leadership ratings between supervisor and follower is high.

*Hypothesis 2*: The mean differences between supervisor and followers rating of ethical leadership and followers’ moral identification jointly moderates the positive relationship between ethical leadership and followers’ voice (three-way interaction). The relationship is strongest when mean differences is low and moral identification is high, whereas relationship is weaker when mean differences is high and moral identification is low.

**Methods**

**Participants and Procedures**

The following research will utilise data collected from its on-going survey across two subsidiaries of a large Malaysian multinational organisation. Multisource feedback (MSF) data were collected at two intervals between November to December 2018 and then again between March to April 2019. Supervisors are asked to provide the ratings of their ethical leadership, while supervisor is asked to provide the ratings of their supervisor's ethical leadership, own moral identification, and voice behaviour. The final sample will compromise data collected from two different operating offices at two countries (i.e., Malaysia and the United Kingdom). The research will control for age, gender, and nested variance on the data.
Measures


To observe (dis)agreement, the raw scores of supervisors and followers’ ratings are subjected to a square root transformation (see Clegg, 1983). The skewness and kurtosis of both ratings will be determined by the frequencies as suggested by Hammer and Landau (1981). The transformed data will be used to compute the mean difference between supervisor and followers’ ratings. Finally, the interclass-correlation (ICC) will be calculated to justify the mean aggregation of the ratings.

The research will adopt Chan’s (1998) dispersion model that usage within-group variation for consistency. As moral identification in the work-unit can be operationalise due to shared understanding, differences in position along a continuum will represent dissimilarity in behaviour (Harrison & Klein, 2007). Therefore, the differences will meet the requirements to address the situational strength systematically that is varied across the conditions of the study (Cooper & Withey, 2009).

Lastly, dummy coding will also be used to distinguish overestimation (i.e., supervisor rating is higher than followers) and underestimation (i.e., supervisor rating is lower than followers). Hierarchical linear modelling (HLM; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002) will be used to test both hypotheses because the model predicts cross-level effects and the data will have a nested structure. Moderation will align with the principles of moderated regression (see Aiken & West, 1991) to highlight the contextual variances in high (vs. low) levels of moral identification.
The present development paper will extend knowledge on the ethical leadership literature by examining the ethical bias phenomenon. Specifically, Tenbrunsel et al. (2010) argued that leader may not be as ethical as they thought and how this association may impact followers’ willingness to voice. To date, studies have mainly focused on the impact of ethical leadership through followers’ perception. However, with the emergence of paper from Qin et al (2018) and Kuenzi et al (2019), both studies results have provided a very different narration on the ethical leadership process. Therefore, by examining how (dis)agreement affect followers’ voice behaviour through moral identification. We extend the prior work on ethical leadership and followers voice (see Mayer, Nurmohamed, Treviño, Shapiro, & Schminke, 2013; Walumbwa et al., 2016) to shed light on the consistency between supervisor and followers’ perception of ethical leadership and how moral identification can buffers this disagreement. (Word Count: 2347).


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